

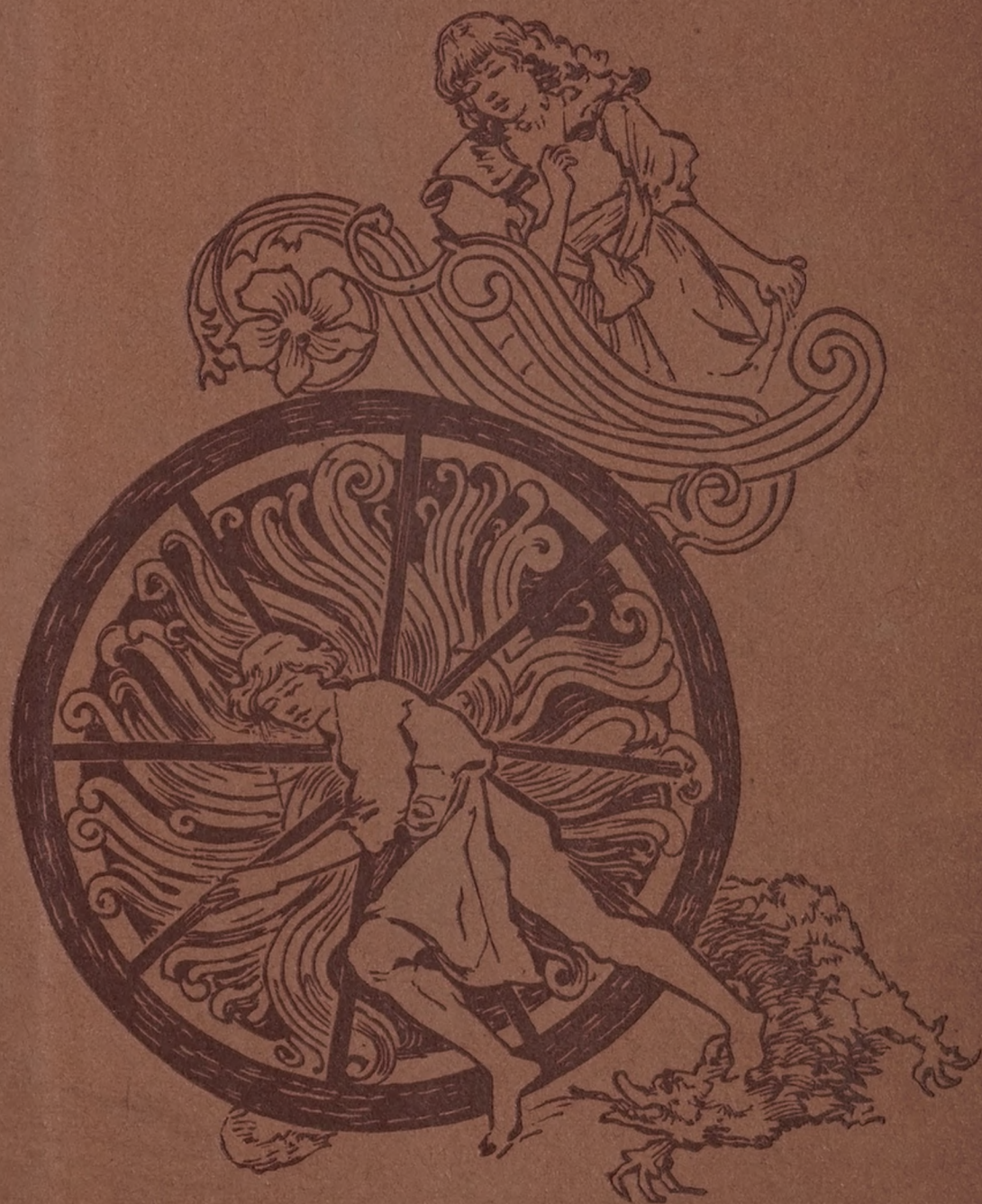
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BAGS AND VELVET GOWNS



·A·G·PLYMPTON·

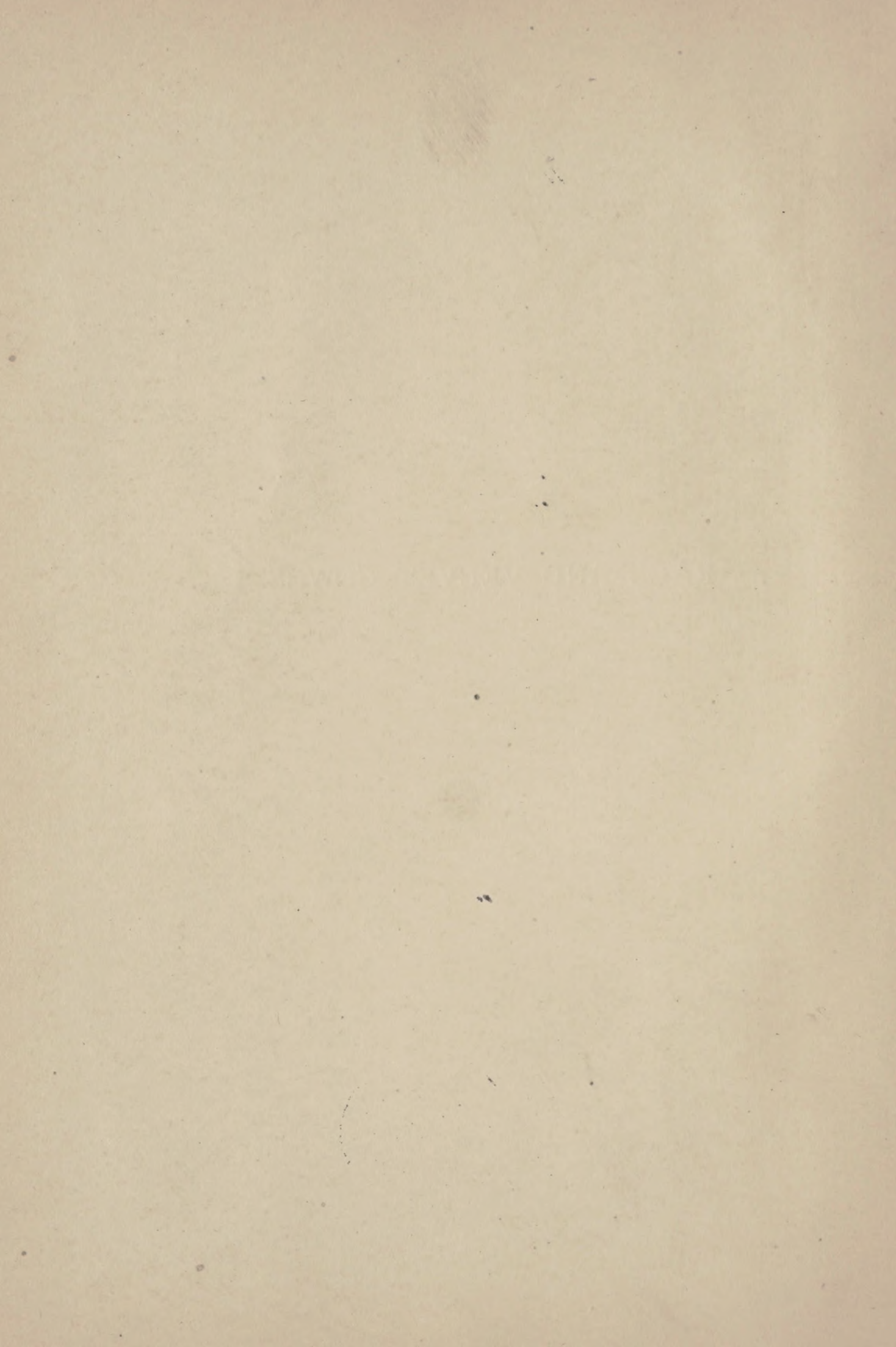
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RAGS AND VELVET GOWNS.



RAGS

AND Velvet Gowns

by

A. G. RYMPTON

Author of

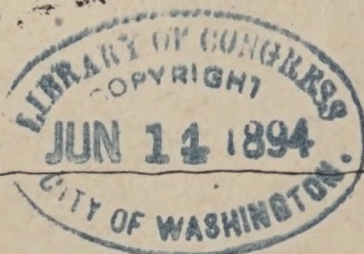
DEAR DAUGHTER DOROTHY
&c.

Illustrated

by

THE AUTHOR

Boston;
Roberts Brothers
1894.



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BY A. G. PLYMPTON.

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TO
ARTHUR AND ELEANOR BURTON

This Little Book

IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED.

RAGS AND VELVET GOWNS.

PART I.



It required a great deal of courage in a baby to grow up in that district of Kingsland called Kingsland Mills, where the Martins lived. There was always an embarrassing surplus of children in this neighborhood, and instead of being welcomed with poetical

rapture, as flowers from Heaven, as with parents whose circumstances admit of sentiment, a child was accepted with anxiety and the prosaic remark, "Well, here's another one to do for." It is to be hoped the little creature was not deceived by this phrase into the expectation of being done for in any comfortable sense, for before it could learn to know its mother's face she would be forced to leave it and go back to her work in the mill. Just as likely as not it would cut its teeth on broken crockery, and take its morning walks almost under the horses' feet in the streets. It must look forward to an ill-fed, over-tasked childhood, and an after life of constant work and worry.

It was upon a world of this sorry sort that Silly Willy first opened his brave, brown eyes. He was a rarely strong



SILLY WILLY.

and handsome child; but when he was laid in his mother's arms she cried feebly, saying that he would never have a fair chance in life, and would grow up to blame her for bringing him into the world. The poor little girl-mother had taken care of herself ever since she was

twelve years old, and was worn out with work. The doctor said that if she valued her life she must now rest quiet a while before going back to her place in the mill; but however we may be in need of rest, our expenses never take a vacation, and in a short time Mary was standing again over her loom.

Willy's father was what he himself styled an agitator, and his business was to make every one as unhappy and dissatisfied as possible. He was a great deal more successful in this than in his former work at the mill, where he had been employed in the repairing shop; but his greatest successes were in his own family. His mother-in-law declared that he was an "out and out bad un," and this nobody ever denied. He drank, he swore, he quarrelled with his neighbors, abused his wife, and taught his

son to dodge a blow by the time he was a toddling two-year-old. Willy never knew his father by any other name than "the bad un."

The same year that Willy was born, a little hemlock-tree pricked through the hard-trampled earth of the enclosure in front of Tim Martin's cottage. It was the only hemlock in that part of the town (Willy's Christmas-tree, the children called it); and the wonder is how it had ever sprung up in that apparently unfavorable spot, and having sprung up should persevere and grow there.

Old Tim and his wife (Willy's grandparents), were very proud of the hemlock, considering themselves complimented that it had singled out their yard among their neighbors, as its growing place.

"Some year we'll have a fine Christ-

mas-tree of it for the lad," Tim would say.

"Some year" meant the long delayed prosperous year of Tim's expectation that would make any additional expense possible. It had never come, it never would come; but this foolish yet wise hope of it had given him strength to cross the dry, feverish desert of the poor man's life, whose pleasant oases exist only in the imagination.

Between Willy and the little tree there seemed some mysterious link, — some identity of being that showed itself in an apparent determination on the part of each to overcome difficulties, and to beautify and cheer the ugly corner of the world in which they chanced to find themselves.

Notwithstanding poor soil and want of culture, the tree had a better chance

in life than the boy. Each summer it spread its branches under the hot sunshine, and its balsamic breath sweetened the neighborhood. Such songs as it sang in the soft south wind were never heard else in the rough turmoil of Kingsland Mills. It sang its message of peace into the hot hearts of the weary working people passing and re-passing; and who stopped sometimes with a smile to say, "Well, Silly Willy's Christmas-tree's a-growin' finely."

They were right. Each year the tree made a wonderful growth. It grew all through those terrible months when the mill was closed and men were desperate from want of work; and the children became familiar with those old dreaded enemies of their class, hunger and cold. While the fever raged that carried away Willy's mother, still the

tree grew. Even in that cruel time when Willy met with the accident that crippled him, and he lay so long moaning and shuddering with pain, the tree kept on growing; and when at length he was able to creep out into the sunshine again, it over-topped him by many inches.

From a physical point of view, there was now no longer any likeness between the hardy young tree and the poor little cripple; but the same spirit seemed to animate both, for both were still vigorously determined to make the best of things.

It was impossible that Willy should ever be very strong again; the rosiness and beauty of his sturdy boyhood was gone, and also — what was far sadder — the bright look of ready intelligence, leaving a far-away expression, not

foolish, but as if the spirit dwelt apart in a world of its own. It must have been a different sort of world from that in which his quarrelsome neighbors lived; for when he smiled, and for a moment his spirit seemed to return, it came in a radiance of peace and goodwill. This must have been what Grandfather Martin meant when he said Willy had a rare Christmas smile. A tenderer and more delicate beauty replaced the splendor of health and vigor he had lost, and his white face, in its frame of silky, flaxen hair had the softness and purity of a pearl.

Although they felt kindly toward him, the mill people unhesitatingly pronounced him an "underwit;" but the children thought him wise. They learned of him secrets of Nature; and they followed him in troops, drawn by the love

that brimmed in his simple heart. Every Sunday or holiday one might see a procession of them filing through the fields with Silly Willy at its head, his flaxen hair blowing in the wind, and his white face set toward the mountains; and here they would stay with him, contentedly, all day long. As for Willy, he was happiest with these simple companions, surrounded by the harmonies of Nature.

Willy never talked very much, but he sang to himself in a low, contented, murmurous way like the tree. Sometimes he would break out in a song of a few clear, beautiful notes; but his grandmother discouraged these outbursts, which she said were "terribly unhealthy to hear."

All beautiful things gave Grandmother Martin what she called "the creeps,"

but nothing so much so as the exquisite sweetness of Silly Willy's voice. It quivered through the old woman's heart and softened it so that it was with the greatest difficulty she could go on scolding poor old Tim, which was the main pleasure of her life.

Even the humblest of us have our little pride, which is the pinch of salt in our otherwise tasteless porridge. Tim Martin's pride was in his wife's unflagging tongue. He was a quiet old fellow himself, finding it difficult to express half the thoughts that floated vaguely through his brain, and he always listened with delighted admiration while his wife scolded him.

"Listen to that now!" sometimes he would say to Willy, nodding brightly toward his wife. "She's ben a-goin' on like that fur more 'n an hour, an'

nothin' fur a subject but an old fool man like me. I'low she'd beat the parsons."

Such complimentary remarks never gratified Grandmother Martin, whose purpose was to stir up an humble spirit of contrition; but the longer she scolded, the prouder was Tim.

After Willy's mother died, "the bad un" declared he was going to start over again with a fresh deal: whereupon he left his son with his grandparents, and married again, — a brawny Irish woman this time, — and settled down cosily into drunken idleness.

Thenceforth whatever troubles befell Willy "the bad un" had no part in them, and that is saying a great deal for a father in Kingsland Mills.

His grandfather was a gentle old man who loved him all the more for his mis-

fortunes. Through good fortune and ill, or rather through ill fortune, and that which was not so ill, Tim Martin bore himself meekly, with that pathetic air of patient endurance observable in old men, to whom life has been cruel. Among his sullen, discontented fellow-workmen, mild old Timothy seemed in the frequent times of trouble like a cheerful cricket chirping on a cold hearthstone.

Not far from the Martins' house was the mill, — a great ugly building where the wheels roared and rumbled all day long. Inside, the noise was so great that no matter how hard you screamed, you never could make any one hear you. The loose cotton fibre filled the air, and the sickening smell of the oil used about the machinery pervaded the building.

Grandfather Martin had grown old and nearly blind in this mill, yet he was as poor now as when in his boyhood he had first set to work there; for the little he was able to save in busy seasons always melted away (as the working-man's savings do) in the hard times when wages are lowered or the mills are closed. There were hundreds of men and women at work there. Some — a very few — were thrifty, but they were nevertheless poor. Most of them were discontented; many were quarrelsome; and all, or nearly all, very ignorant.

Early one autumn morning, old Martin and his grandson were making their way to the mill, which stood dark and grim against the glowing sky of the east. There was a film over Tim's eyes that dimmed the beauty of the morning;

but Willy saw the dewy fields in all their gloss and glitter as they stretched under the morning sunshine, away to the dark-plumed hills. The mountain breeze blew fresh and cool, but the operatives were hurrying into the mill, and Tim in his uncomplaining submission, and Willy with his bright cheerfulness, followed them.

Whiz — whir! Already the steam was turning those giant wheels till the floor seemed to rock under the jar of the machinery. Willy began to gather the empty spindles, smiling his sweet luminous smile at one of the girls who jostled against him in her hurry to reach her machine. The day's work had begun.

It was half after six. At noon there would be a half-hour for dinner; and then work again until the sun had made its daily journey over the earth and the

fields were growing gray in the cooling light.

Silly Willy put his hand to his head oftener than usual that morning, for the throb of the machinery seemed repeated there. His damp, flaxen hair curled about his face, while drops of sweat, like beads, stood out on the white skin. His eyes were hot and tired. At midday, when suddenly the great humming wheels stood still, he climbed up on to the window-seat with his dinner.

There were two women also there, and several others soon crowded around, all talking in angry, excited tones; but Willy did not listen, for he was trying to look over the tops of the mill-houses and tenements to the green fields which lay beyond, and to catch the breeze that seemed to be blowing the dark gray-green plumes of the pines.

"It's still an' pleasant, ain't it?" he said aloud suddenly, for he was fancying himself on the distant hill. "We're lucky to be here where there ain't no noise, an' no machines."

"Lucky! Listen to Silly Willy!" cried one of the women. "Did ye know your last bit o' luck, child? Wages to be cut down!"

"It's a crool shame, inyhow," struck in Mary McHennessy. "An' *him* livin' on the fat o' the land. But if ye was to schrape Marsachusetts wid a foine tooth comb, ye'd niver come across a maner man than ould King, — an' bad luck to him, ses I."

"That's the way 'the bad un' talks," said Willy, uneasily; "but grandfer says he gives us work, an' we'd oughter be grateful."

"Grateful! An' who gits the fat share

o' profits? We're workin' more fur him 'n fur ourselves."

"Look out there!" cried one of the women on the window-seat, shrilly; "an' ye'll see who we're a-workin' fur, — fur that little ninny who's a-settin' up there like a queen."

Silly Willy looked with the others, and saw a little girl with a cloud of golden hair, sitting in a carriage. In her splendid blond beauty she was like a dazzle of sunshine. Her white frock and glistening hair shone against the dark green of the carriage cushions. One of the two women who attended her held a large white parasol over her head, and the other carried an armful of bright wraps. The polished harness glittered in the sunlight as the horses impatiently pawed the ground.

It made a picture of sumptuous ele-

gance to Willy, who laughed aloud in his enjoyment.

“I ’m a workin’ fur *her*, then,” he said joyfully, “an’ never knew it afore.”

The women were too much interested in the bright scene below to notice the folly of Silly Willy; for the little girl with nurse and governess was getting out of the carriage, evidently intending to enter the mill. At once they had recognized the child as the daughter of their employer.

Instead of being called by his rightful name, which was Richard King, this man was known among them as King Richard; for, besides the mill, he owned the cottages in which they lived, and for which they were obliged to pay such rent as he chose to ask. The stores where they traded were his stores; and he had so much money that, as no one liked to offend him, town affairs were managed

pretty much as he wished. It was said that ever since his wife died his only object in life was to pile up a great fortune, and that he plucked the feathers that made his own nest so soft from an already stripped and shivering people. These unfortunates hated him bitterly, and also Mr. Bellew, his chief superintendent, who was responsible for much that made their lives hard. Being ignorant and unjust, they included little Katherine in their dislike, although she was innocent of any fault toward them.

This was the first time that she had ever visited the mill, and she looked about her with a child's wide-eyed wonder. The working women returned this look over their machines with one of suppressed hostility. Lovely little Katherine, so softly nurtured, guarded by governess and nurse, could but remind them of their own neglected little ones

stumbling on their ill-starred, unblessed way. They wagged their heads angrily, looking meaningly at each other, so that the child saw no friendly face except that of Silly Willy, which, in strange contrast, was glowing with admiration and delight. She went up to him and asked him his name, but the steam was now on again, and she could not hear what he said. Perceiving that speech was impossible, Katherine took a white rose which was stuck in her sash and held it toward him. Willy took it gratefully, understanding the friendly act as he might not have understood spoken words.

He laid his cheek gently against it, while she, looking back and smiling in response to his smile, hurried away with the governess.

“An’ I’m a-workin’ fur her,” thought the poor simple boy; “I ain’t goin’ to



“ Katherine took a white rose and held it toward him.”

mind the noise now, for I’m a-workin’
fur the little un.”

He pinned the rose carefully on his
ragged blouse; and the last Katherine
saw of him, as she looked back into the
room, he was trundling with new en-
ergy one of the baskets full of spindles
down the aisle.

PART II.



KATHERINE.

THE following morning, Miss Purdy, the governess, and Rose, the nurse, declared that Katherine was cross; and she seemed to feel it in-

cumbent upon her to prove their words true. She was an odd being, this beautiful little Katherine, with varying moods, but that of a proud aloofness was most frequent. In this mood she was usually

accused of crossness by nurse, who had not that imaginative sympathy that would enable her to understand her strange charge. Whatever odd thing she said or did, Rose suggested some ugly motive for it. When Miss Purdy came as governess to Katherine, she accepted the opinions of nurse ready made, preferring the risk of misfits to the trouble of forming more accurate ones for herself. The constant misunderstandings, the deeply felt want of sympathy, had made Katherine very reserved. Her father, although he cared for no one as he did for his child, was too much occupied with his business to see very much of her, which left her almost entirely to the society of the two women.

There were to be no lessons that morning, for Katherine had said so; and

Miss Purdy always obeyed Katherine's wish. When King Richard had engaged the governess it was with the expressed desire that she should make Katherine obey, but with such tact that she would never be made unhappy. This is an achievement which is quite possible in the minds of those who have never had any care of children. Katherine, however, was always unhappy unless she had her own way, and when this was explained to her father he only said, —

“Well, well, let her have her own way, then. Above all, I wish her to be happy.”

When, after breakfast that morning, Katherine opened her story-book, Miss Purdy began to write French exercises at the desk. Although she had no particular use for that language, Miss Purdy

was very fond of studying French, — much fonder than of studying the character of Katherine.

“Well, if anybody is going to write them it had better be she, for she likes to, and I don’t,” Katherine said to herself.

Nurse had brought a great pile of mending, and sat down by the window for a pleasant chat with herself, after a fashion she had. She said she liked to talk to herself because she was never interrupted, no one corrected her parts of speech, and then she could see to it that nothing unpleasant was said to her.

“I declare, Mis Martin is gettin’ too old to do washin’,” she began, in a sociable way, as she looked over one of Katherine’s waists, “though like enough she is n’t so old as she looks. Drubbin’

over a wash-tub don't give any great style to the figger. Poor old thing, she does work hard! I was sorry to see that grandson of hers a-workin' in the mill,—him they call Silly Willy, you know," she added, nodding to Miss Purdy.

"Oh, I saw him too," exclaimed Katherine, jumping up. "He walks like this."

She limped across the room in such good imitation of Silly Willy that both women laughed, though sorely against their will, and the governess said,—

"You have a bad heart, Katherine, or you would n't mock a poor little cripple. I should think you would be sorry for him."

"I'm not sorry for him at all," answered Katherine.

She had meant only to describe the

boy, and had no thought of mockery in her heart; but she was too proud to explain this, and took a perverse pleasure in shocking her uncharitable companions.

“Now, listen to that!” said nurse, holding up her hands. “Why, it just breaks my heart to think of the poor little white creetur in that rickerty rackerty place; but it’s easy to see he’ll never be able to stand it long. *He’ll* never make old bones. An’ he’s a gentle lad, never one for complaining, — neither him nor his grandfather, though the grandmother scolds enough for the three of ’em.”

“Some of those folks down there do be terrible cross and dissatisfied,” Rose went on, after a pause. “There’s Mis Saunders, now, — the Saunders live in the next house to the Martins, — she

can't make up her mind to things-as-they-is. She's that sort of a cross an' dissatisfied creetur; an' there's nothing too hard fur her to say against him-that-must n't-be-mentioned."

This was the term by which nurse always designated King Richard when she had anything to say to his disadvantage. It was an odd notion of Miss Purdy and Rose that Katherine understood only that part of their conversation that was intended for her, and now they did not notice her crimson cheeks and the angry glances she darted toward them.

"Well, Jim Saunders invented something about the machinery that saves hundreds of dollars every year," Rose continued, "an' Mis Saunders, she will have it that Jim's family oughter get some good out of it. She's always

railing at the law which says the employer gets the whole, 'cause 't was done in workin' hours, when his time was paid for. The Saunderses had nigh on to a dozen children, — not a pretty sort of children either, but lookin' like a pack of hungry wolves; an' after a bit Jim got discouraged, an' took to drinking hard, and then of course he got turned off from the mill. He might have done better perhaps if Mis Saunders had chirked him up; but instead of that, having such a dissatisfied disposition, you know, she couldn't be cheerful. They would have starved, I expect, if it had n't been for the neighbors; an' as it was, two of the children died. That kinder eased things a little, I guess, for then there was all the more for the others. An' Jim, he was run over one night, an' though it don't sound well to

say so, that was really a great streak of luck; for Jim did n't get work, an' Mis Saunders could n't earn enough to take care of the whole of 'em. They are middlin' comfortable now, I guess; but lor! Mis Saunders is just as dissatisfied as ever."

"Such as she will have a hard time to get along if the wages are lowered, as there is a rumor of," said Miss Purdy.

"A cruel thing! An' if 'tis done, there'll be plenty o' sufferin'; an' him-that-must n't-be-mentioned will have it all to answer for," cried nurse. "They do say the hands are going to strike. But though things-as-they-is is pretty hard on 'em, there's no good in striking; for what's the use of the mouse declarin' he won't be eat up when the cat's already got his paw on him?"

"I know what you mean, and I hope

he will eat up every one of them," suddenly burst out Katherine.

There is nothing more cruelly hard for a child to bear than the disparagement in mysterious terms that she cannot reply to of one she loves. Katherine's anger conquered the shyness that came with a consciousness that she was at a disadvantage in this conversation; but her hot speech meant nothing but the determination to stand loyally by her father. The women, however, looked at her disapprovingly.

"She's just like her pa, for all the world. Her heart is as hard as a stone," whispered nurse; and the governess nodded significantly.

Katherine waited to hear no more, but ran away into the hall, — that grand hall of King Richard's that went from end to end of his splendid big house.

There was an ample fireplace in it, and a blazing fire cast a glowing reflection upon the polished floor; but for all that it had not an air of cheer, it never echoed to fond, happy voices, it did not seem the entrance of that place of peace and love, — a home. As she paced it, little Katherine sighed with loneliness, and her light footfall seemed to waken a dreary echo.

At length she stopped before the library door and looked in wistfully at her father, who, with close attention, was looking over some papers.

It had been one of the laws under which Katherine had grown from babyhood, that on no pretext whatever was she to enter this room or seek her father there. In it the spirit of business was the deity that neither slumbered nor slept. Now, however, the love-hunger

and loneliness in her heart drove her there, and she stood on the threshold,



silent but beseeching. Presently King Richard, looking up, gave a start, for the sunny-haired girl reminded him of one who had so often invaded his grim sanctum with another spirit than its own, which indeed, humbled and conquered, had hidden itself in the remotest corner.

“She stood on the threshold, silent but beseeching.”

“What is it, Katherine?” he asked. “Come in.”

"Oh may I, father?" she cried, shooting like a ray of sunshine to his side. "I am so lonely!"

"Lonely?" repeated King Richard, frowning. "I want you to be happy, and I told Miss Purdy so. 'Tis an odd thing indeed if my child can't be made happy. You shall have more dolls."

"I don't want them, father; dolls are such stupid things. No matter how much you love them, they never will love you at all. Yesterday I put mine all away in a big, big box. There were fifty-two, and not one cared a straw for me."

"Well, what would you like, Katherine? You shall have anything you want."

"But I don't know what I want," answered the child, nestling so close to him that the spirit which had been at

his elbow moved away, and he began to stroke the beautiful golden head, and think of her he had called the Queen of Sunshine, who had made all his paths the paths of pleasantness and peace.

"I wish, father," said Katherine, suddenly looking up into his eyes, "that I was like Mr. Bellew."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed King Richard, staring at the round, rosy face before him, and thinking of the long, sallow one of his superintendent, "why do you wish to resemble Bellew?"

"Because you like to talk to Mr. Bellew, and I think he must be very amusing. Somehow I can't think of a single thing to say about business."

Her father looked at her a moment, and then laughed.

"You might try. I dare say 't would be more amusing than you think."

But Katherine shook her head. "Is business really the only thing that amuses you, father?"

Just as she asked this question there was a sharp ring at the bell, and Mr. Bellew himself was shown in. Instantly King Richard put Katherine down, bidding her run away to her governess, adding, as he read disappointment in her wistful face, that she could tell Miss Purdy to take her down to the shops and buy her whatever she wished there. But, as there was nothing the little girl wished, this privilege did not console her for the loss of her father's company. She looked back enviously at the fortunate Mr. Bellew, who however did not seem to appreciate this good fortune, for he looked annoyed and said, in an exasperated tone, —

"Well, those fools at the mills have struck!"

Katherine slipped out, with her thoughts brought round again to the talk of nurse that had vexed her so. All the love and kindness she had ever known had been given her by her father, and she would not have dreamt of blaming him for the distress of the mill people; but whose fault was it, she wondered. Instead of going back to Miss Purdy and Rose, she sat down on the wooden seat built into the fireplace in the hall, thinking that perhaps when Mr. Bellew went away her father would take her into the library again; but when at last Mr. Bellew went out her father followed him.

King Richard and the superintendent drove to the mills. Passing through the district where the working people lived, one might easily guess at the misery of their lives. Yet it made little

impression on King Richard's mind, who, if he noticed it, blamed their want of thrift or love of drink. He prided himself upon being a practical business man and no sentimentalist, and believed that by paying them such wages as the profit on his business allowed, he had performed his whole duty toward them; therefore it angered him that they would not accept the new scale of wages he had made, and decreed that if they did not return to their work at a certain date their places should be filled by others, thus cutting off all chance of their getting work that winter, as other mills were turning away old workmen rather than hiring new ones.

It was a chilly, gray-toned day which hinted at a rigorous winter. The prospect of fields and distant hills that had

been so pleasant the day before was now dreary enough, and drearier still seemed the old mill itself in its unwonted mood of grim, sullen silence. None of the sights and sounds of the usual busy day met the two men as they approached. The mill seemed utterly deserted; so that on going up the steps it was a surprise to find Silly Willy in the doorway. He was sitting with his head resting wearily against the panel of the door, and was blue with the cold as if he had waited so a long while.

"What do you want here?" asked the superintendent.

"I want to go in an' work," answered Willy. "I ain't joined the strike."

He stood up, and looked into the men's faces with that exquisite smile of his.

"I ain't joined the strike, for I want to keep a-workin' for the little un. I want to go in an' work."

"Is the little one your sister?" asked King Richard.

"No, sir; it's her that came yesterday ter the mill, — her that we work for, an' keep always soft an' pretty an' warm."

King Richard started. He turned his face from the keen eyes of the superintendent, for he knew now whom the boy meant.

"I want to go in an' work. I want to go in an' work," reiterated Silly Willy.

His smile faded, and the day seemed grayer and chillier than ever. The wind blew his flaxen hair away from his face, showing more plainly the pinch of pain and poverty. He shivered piteously in his ragged garments.

"The mill will be opened in a few days again," said Mr. Bellew. "You had better go home now. It's cold enough standing here in the wind."

"An' while the mill is closed will the little un be kep' soft an' pretty an' warm?"

"She will be comfortable," answered King Richard, grimly. "Go home and keep warm yourself."

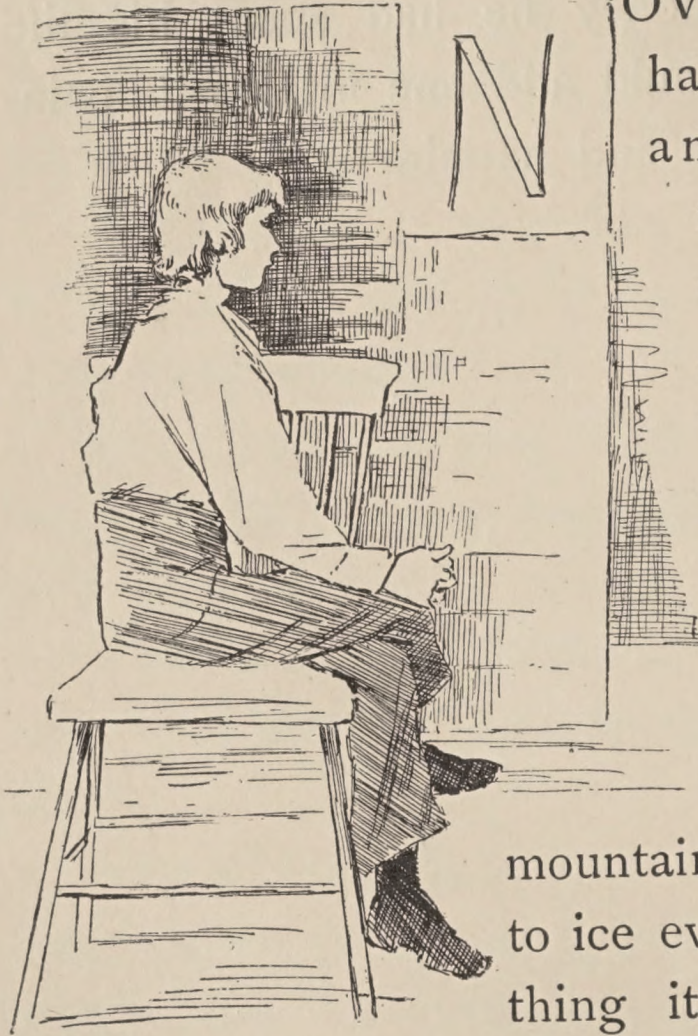
Willy obeyed, limping stiffly down the steps, while the two men entered the mill.

"Poor fellow, he is almost an idiot," said Mr. Bellew,—"Tim Martin's grandson."

King Richard made no comment. He was a grave man, not given to many words; but his thought was, that he would look after this little cripple, and see that he was made comfortable.

Unhappily in the press of business this impulse of his better nature was forgotten; and when next he looked upon the still, sweet face of Silly Willy, not all the money he had spent his life to gain could add one iota to its painless peace and happiness.

PART III.



NOVEMBER
had passed,
and winter set in
with drifts
of snow.
The north
wind, that
blew in
gusts
down
from the
mountains, turned
to ice every living
thing it met. It
silenced the merry
brooks and crystallized the woods.

Willy's hemlock looked like a tree from the enchanted land.

The operatives at Kingsland Mills, forced to accept the reduced wages, had returned to their work. Several mills in the town had closed altogether, for business was very dull that winter; and many men and women from other towns, with the vain hope of finding work there, had pressed into Kingsland. The distress of the working people was of painful distinctness. Gloomy faces looked out from the windows of the small cottages, and from crazy rookeries where dozens of families herded together, came the sound of the cursing and quarrelling of idle men and the crying of miserable children.

Late in November, after a sharp, short illness, Grandmother Martin died. She had been a fretful old woman, having

known nothing of life save its work and worry; but Tim and Silly Willy had not so many friends that they did not miss her sorely. Often of an evening, as they sat listening to the wind drearily moaning in the chimney, Willy would get up, and scraping the frost off the window-pane, look out into the wintry night. Once he asked Tim if he were not afraid his grandmother was cold out there in the sleet and ice where they had laid her, but Tim answered cheerfully, —

“Dear, no, child. She’s comfortable now, unless ’t is for a grievance to scold over. She might miss that, bein’ used to a plenty to choose from. But them that’s gone has the best of it, Willy; I’m sure o’ that. She’s a heap more comfortable ’n we be. Don’t be frettin’ for her, boy.” And in his trustful way Willy settled down again, murmuring contentedly. —



OLD TIM.

“She’s more comfortable ’n we be.
We mustn’t fret for her.”

The winter bore hard indeed upon
these two,—the feeble old man and

the poor weak-minded boy,—yet neither complained. Often they were hungry, and still oftener very cold, and worse than all to Tim was the fear that his blindness would increase until he would be unable to work; yet he bore all with his usual gentle patience. Neither did Willy's bright cheerfulness forsake him; for no sense of injustice, no resentment, embittered their sweet natures.

“It's a dreadful bad winter anyhow,” old Tim said one morning, as they ate their crusts of bread before going to work. “Folks everywhere is feelin' the hard times. It ain't us alone. King Richard himself is obleeged to draw in some, I reckon. Sure Bellew hinted as much, sayin' we've all gotter take our share of the trouble. I heard some one say that King Richard has had to sell one of them fine saddle horses o' his.

That come hard on him, now I dare say."

"Do you think he's ever cold, Grandfer, an'—an' hungry?" questioned Willy, looking up with a start from the fireless hearth. "Oh, I'm afeard for the little un!"

"No, no; they ain't cold an' hungry. Ye need n't fret fur that," answered the grandfather.

But for all this assurance anxiety clouded Willy's soft eyes. All day his trouble grew. When the wind drove its sharp teeth through his ragged clothing, he whispered to himself, "Oh, the poor little un!" and when his head whirled giddily from the faintness in his stomach, again he moaned, "Oh, the poor little un!"

No one sympathized with his fears. The mill people laughed scornfully, and

said he was fast losing the few wits he had. Only the hemlock-tree, seeming to share this as it did all his thoughts, caught the refrain, and moaned after him, "Oh, the poor little un! the poor little un!"

As far as her material welfare was concerned, Katherine needed no one's sympathy; but Christmas was now coming, and Katherine felt her loneliness never so much as at this season. The thought of the coming festival, in which no one would be likely to find any enjoyment, wearied her. Her little soft pink mouth took a persistent downward curve, and her white brow under the golden love-locks puckered into a constant frown. Perceiving her sad looks, King Richard was troubled, and gave orders that the Christmas festivities should be upon a more generous scale than usual, and no wish of Katherine's denied.

Katherine watched these preparations with a doleful air that exasperated the nurse and governess, who tried to scold her into a more fitting humor.

“It ain’t healthy for a child not to like Christmas; but I never did see such a queer girl as you are.” Nurse had a way of uttering the word *queer* so as to make it very objectionable to Katherine, who thought she would prefer to be called by some purposely disagreeable word. “You take no more interest in your Christmas-tree than if you was an old woman of eighty.”

“Then what’s the use of having one for me?” Katherine asked; “I don’t want it.”

“Oh, your father has ordered it. You *must* have it,” nurse said; and Miss Purdy added mournfully, —

“And he wishes us to be very merry.

It's a great trial, but we've all got to go through with it. So do be a good child, and not go about looking so forlorn. I believe you mope on purpose, knowing nurse and I will be blamed for it."

"And the idea of it now, when there's not another child in all Kingsland that wouldn't dance with delight to have half as much done for her," nurse struck in sharply. "I declare, I'd like to shake you."

Strange as it may appear, Katherine was not urged by these remarks into a happier mood, but crept off by herself where her mirthlessness would not be commented on. She curled herself up in her favorite seat by the fire in the hall.

"How can one enjoy a Christmas-tree all by one's self?" she thought,

not unreasonably. "It's so tiresome in Miss Purdy and Rose to expect me to jump about because other children do. And what do I care for the presents? The dolls — of course there will be dolls — I shall put away with the old ones. There will be games, I suppose; but what's the good of a game for *one*? Oh, yes, there'll be piles of presents, as usual."

Katherine stood up, with her arms outstretched, and yawned until one could see halfway down her little red throat. She felt dull and lonely, and it was easy to see that the anticipated presents really gave her little pleasure. Yet as she stood there, with her golden locks blazing in the firelight, her alert little figure built for merry motion, her round cheeks softly curved and blooming with health, she seemed made for happiness.

In the afternoon, with Miss Purdy and Rose, Katherine rode to the town. It was a clear, sharp day, and the crust of the snow was so hard that it glistened like ice in the sun; the shadows in the drifts were spaces of pure, translucent color — blue or pinky violet. The icicles hung from the roofs like a crystal fringe, and the air seemed full of glistening points of light. It was two days before Christmas, and the town wore a merry holiday air. The sleigh bells made a pleasant chime, and the streets were crowded with merry-makers. But one may be sure there was little merry-making that year in the district of Kingsland Mills. There a bitter despondency reigned — a brutal, revengeful spirit, far enough from peace and good-will. Instead of mirth there was drunken misery; instead of pleasant greetings, street

brawlings and oaths. They, the poor whom the Lord of this festival most loved, are seldom present now at His birthday feast.

Fourteen times since Silly Willy was first laid in his mother's arms and she had wept that he was born to inherit the miseries of her existence, this beautiful season of Christmas had come round. Never had it come to Tim Martin's cottage with gifts and feasting and holiday cheer. Never yet had the hemlock-tree been dressed and lighted for the festival. Often at this season as at others there had been a scarcity of food and fuel; but never had it come with such hopelessness as now, for that long-felt fear that had followed Tim like a soft-footed tiger had at length sprung upon him. One cruel day he had been turned off from the mill, where he had worked for so

many years, and now sat through the weary hours in idle darkness and perplexity that tried not to be despair.

So Willy was now the sole wage-winner, and both must contrive to live on the little he could earn. Tim's blindness at least saved him from one pitiful sight, — that of his grandson's face growing whiter, thinner, and sweeter, as the little thread of life wore away.

Now it happened that the street through which King Richard's coachman usually drove to the town was impassable that day, and he was obliged to go through Kingsland Mills, and for this reason Katherine came to have a second glimpse of Silly Willy.

The snow had blown in a huge drift into the Martin's yard, and Willy had begun to make a path through it to the gate; but the task had stretched beyond

his strength, and he had sunk down, exhausted in the snow within a few feet of its termination. The wind was playing through the hemlock, which waved its fragrant branches and spoke to him in soft, soothing whispers. Simple creatures like Willy, to whom human speech is often unmeaning, understand these voices of Nature, to whose message the so-called wise are often deaf. As he lay there listening contentedly to the tree the sleigh of King Richard passed by.

Since she had seen him at the mill Katherine had never forgotten the white, tired, but exquisitely happy face of Silly Willy; but now it was hidden from her, and she could only see his lean, ill-clad, crooked little figure as it lay prone on the bed of snow. She pitied him, not knowing that he was happier than herself; but not for the world would she have

owned this to the two women, who began to contrast his life with hers, trying to draw from her some expression of sympathy.

The love that was really warm and vital in Katherine's heart was never recognized because of this proud perversity that led her to hide it as if it were a disgrace.

To her governess and nurse she had never seemed more perverse and unlovely than upon this afternoon when she opposed all their plans. One of their errands was the purchase of the Christmas-tree, but none pleased Katherine, who finally declared she would have the little hemlock of Silly Willy's — that or none.

The women were aghast at this freak, which would rob Silly Willy of the one poor joy of his life, but they dared not

refuse Katherine's wish, since it was King Richard's order that all her wishes should be gratified.

However, it was now too late in the afternoon to visit the Martin's cottage, and the women agreed that they would go there early on the following morning; but in the morning Miss Purdy was called away by a summons from her home, and poor Rose was laid up in her bed by rheumatism.

It was well that the mill was closed that next day, for, on waking, Willy felt strangely weak.

"There's somethin' queer ails me, Grandfer," he said in a sweet, faint voice, and smiling bravely with blue lips. "I can't hold myself up."

"Lie there, then, boy. 'Tis an off day anyhow. Lie still an' rest yerself," the grandfather answered. There was a

thick darkness between him and Willy's face, else he would have seen that the end was near.

The cottage was bitterly cold and very quiet. No outer thing was visible, for the window-panes were quite frosted over, and the snow muffled the out-door sounds. From force of habit old Tim sat by the stove, but there was no fire in it. Once or twice he spread out his shaking old hands toward it, and then drew them back with a start. Willy lay absolutely motionless.

The stillness was not broken until nearly noon, when a light knock, as if made by a child's hand, was heard at the door. Tim got up and, groping his way to the door, opened it, and suddenly, in all the affluence of her wealth and youth and beauty, Katherine stood in the little room.

Her voice at once roused Willy, who opened his eyes with a look of pleased wonder.

"Is he sick?" asked Katherine, tremulously of Tim.

"A bit weak-like, Miss, that's all. Speak to her, Willy."

"No, I ain't sick," said Willy, with that same blue smile. "I've been a bit chilly, but I ain't now. An' you? Are you warm?"

"Yes," said Katherine, "I am warm."

"But clear through?" persisted Willy. "Doesn't the cold bite through this?" he said, touching her thick coat. "Doesn't it make your teeth rattle?"

"No," answered Katherine again. "I am quite warm."

"And in the house, too,—does the fire burn *all the time* there?"

"Yes, all the time," said Katherine.

"That's good. I'm glad of that," whispered Silly Willy, smiling still. "An' is there plenty to eat — always plenty to eat?"

"Oh, yes," answered Katherine, "there is always plenty."

"The little un, she's always warm. She ain't never hungry — never," he said to Tim, with a sudden radiance. "The times ain't so bad, Grandfer, are they?"

Katherine looked in pity at the bare, cheerless room, at the remnant of bread and cold tea of which these two had made breakfast, at the age-worn, patient figure of Tim, and lastly at Willy.

"I don't wonder you are cold; there's no fire here," she said.

"I was cold, but I ain't cold now; there ain't nothin' troublin' me."

"He's a bit tired this mornin'," added

the grandfather; "but ter-morrow 'll be Christmas day, an' he 'll be up then, I 'll warrant ye."

"Yes," said Katherine; "to-morrow will be Christmas, and I 'm to have a Christmas-tree. I want the one in the yard there."

"My tree!" cried Willy, startled; "my Christmas-tree!"

"Why, yes," laughed Katherine; "it's prettier than any I saw in the shops."

"'Tis a rare, fine tree, Miss," said Tim, troubled, for the tree seemed a part of Willy. "Many a time but for this he would have chopped it into firewood. 'Tis a fine tree, but 'tis a comfort to the boy, an' I've often thought sometime it might be we could fix it up for a Christmas-tree, an' him an' the children here would think a sight of it,

never havin' seen one, ye know, Miss. Yes, 't is the boy's tree."

Willy seemed not to hear what his grandfather said. He turned his head to look out of the window, from which one usually caught a glimpse of the hemlock, but now it was quite hidden by the thick coat of frost.

"The tree, 't was fur the little un, an' I never knew it," he said slowly. "Will it have candles shining thick like stars in the branches?"

"Yes, I promise you it shall," answered Katherine.

"An' he'll never see it, poor boy, after all," murmured Tim. "Poor little chap, it seems hard on him. No, he'll not see it."

"Yes, yes, I'll see it; don't fret about that. I'll see it o' dark nights with my eyes shut. Many a thing I see that

way, an' I think I'll see the tree," said Willy, dreamily; then turning to Katherine, he went on, "You're welcome to the tree; an' I wish — I wish you — what is it they say, Grandfer? I've forgot how the words go."

"I wish you Merry Christmas an' Happy New Year," said the old man, — "that's the sayin'. It don't mean nothin' 's I know of, but it sounds pleasant."

That afternoon one of King Richard's men came to take away the tree. The stroke of the axe fell faintly upon the stillness of the cottage, blending with Willy's dreams, for he lay dozing. Old Tim, going out into the yard, begged some twigs of the hemlock, which he laid in Willy's hands, and which scented the room with their spicy odor.

When the people of Kingsland Mills learned why the tree had been carried away, they were angry.

“They’ll have our skins next, to make purses of,” they said bitterly.

PART IV.



KING RICH-
ARD'S hall
had put on fes-
tal cheer. In
festoons along its walls
hung the Christmas
greens, branches of
holly filled the chim-
ney panel, and the mis-
tletoe hung from the
rafters. Upon a daïs at
the end of the hall stood
the tree, a dusky green,
against which the blonde beauty of
Katherine flashed and gleamed glo-
riously.

The child's face was radiant with happiness, which sparkled in her eyes, glowed in her cheeks, and stirred her at last into frolicsome, childlike movement. With her golden curls floating over her shoulders, she danced fairy-like around the tree, while in pleased surprise King Richard stood watching her.

"But the tree is rather small," he said at length, doubtfully.

"Large enough to hold nearly all the presents I have ever had. Oh, Father, I am glad now that I have had so many."

"Well, you are to have new ones," said King Richard, "many new ones; I have ordered the women to buy them. You must n't hang these old things on your tree, foolish child."

He pointed to a miscellaneous heap of toys that had been laid by the side of the daïs.

"Must n't I?" said Katherine. "Oh, why not? I thought I was to have everything to please me."

"Well, well, then," laughed the father. "It is true I care only that you are pleased."

"Then you must help me tie them on," Katherine entreated. "I can't reach, and John is so clumsy. Besides, it will be so nice for us to do it together."

Laughing at her whim, King Richard nevertheless obeyed it, until the tree was loaded with its gay burden.

"Dear child," the father said, as for a moment they stood looking at the tree, "it must have been many a year since some of these toys were given you. I believe here are all you have ever had. Do you never play with them then, you strange child? See,"

he said, pointing to the fifty-two dolls that had been recalled from banishment, and were now hanging in a smiling row around the lower branches of the tree, "see, these look like new."

"It's so lucky, so lucky," laughed Katherine, gleefully.

"I would rather you had enjoyed them."

"I am enjoying them now. Oh, Father, I could not spare one."

At his puzzled face she burst into ringing laughter, and again began her light tiptoe dance. Suddenly she came to a standstill, saying earnestly, —

"Father, won't you come to-morrow evening to the tree? You never came to the other trees; but they were stupid things. Oh, won't you come to this one? I know it won't be stupid, for I have invited to it Silly Willy and all the people at Kingsland Mills."

King Richard started violently. "Silly Willy and all the people at Kingsland Mills," he repeated.

Katherine did not seem to notice his tone of displeased disgust. She gathered up her dainty skirts, and began to take little mincing steps around him, humming, —

"Oh, I am so happy, so happy, so happy!"

She seemed all at once to have entered into a natural, happy childhood, having been transformed as by magic from the dreary little maid that had made his heart so sore. Nevertheless, in his annoyance he burst out, —

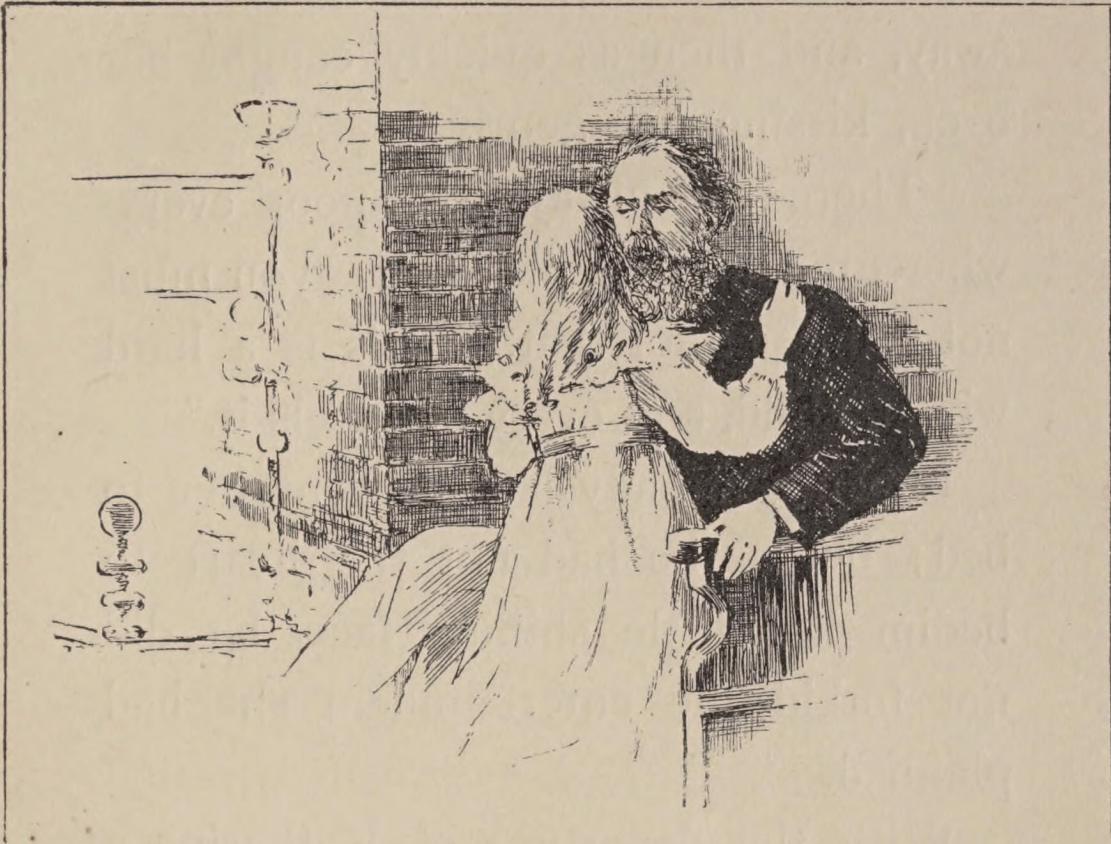
"Those people at Kingsland Mills are a set of stubborn, unreasonable idiots. Can't you be happy without bringing them here?"

"No, I am tired of lonesome Christ-

mases, Father; and I knew that I could invite them, because you said that I was to have everything that I wished," Katherine answered joyously, quite innocent of his real feeling. "When I found that Silly Willy had always looked forward to having a Christmas-tree for the children at the mills, I thought how much better it would be here instead of the stupid, lonesome trees I have been used to. Oh, what *will* Silly Willy say when he sees how beautiful I have made his tree?"

Like a golden sunbeam she flashed in her dance against the sombre green of the tree, then suddenly assumed a strange air of gravity.

"Father, they are poor — *so* poor, those people at Kingsland Mills. I went into their cottages this afternoon, and I think they are cold. Father, I



“Father, I think they are hungry. Oh, why do you let them be so?”

think they are *hungry*. Oh, why do you let them be so?”

She pressed close up into his arms, so that her innocent, puzzled eyes were on a level with his face, and looked down fathoms deep into his.

King Richard pushed her quickly away, and then as quickly caught her back, kissing her gently.

"There are always the poor everywhere, my darling," he said; "you must not blame me for that. This is a hard winter, child, and every one feels it."

It being already late, he sent her to bed; but as he had not the heart to bedim her little shining face, he did not forbid the entertainment she had planned.

With the departure of Katherine a silence fell upon the hall, which seemed to have taken its color from the warmth of her vivid happiness; the firelight died away, for the logs had fallen apart, and lay smouldering in the ashes on either side of the andirons, a little thin current of blue smoke curling from each up the chimney.

King Richard sat motionless, gazing absently into the fireplace; the fragrant breath of the hemlock-tree was reviving memories that blocked the drift of his usual thought, — memories of happier years when, far from regarding the Christmas celebration as a thing fit only for women and children, he had made it the occasion of kind acts and cheerful charities.

The Christmas-tree breathed softly upon the silence of the large hall, seeming to whisper "peace and good-will." It stirred King Richard's heart with to him unaccountable suggestions. Avarice folded its long, lean arms, and rancor slept. The hostility between himself and those poor working people at the mills now seemed to him a strange and ugly thing. He recalled a time when there was no such jarring discord

in his life. When Katherine was born, these people of his seemed to share in his pride and joy. When her mother died, they had followed sorrowing with him to her burial. He had called their children by name, and they had trusted him. This condition of mistrust, this hateful enmity between them, had grown steadily year by year, as his fortune had grown, at an ever increasing rate. Suddenly he realized that his life helped to make the world hideous with the ghastly contrasts of riches and poverty, luxury and want, rags and velvet gowns. But now it was the season of love, and forbearance, and charity, — the time when, if ever, our hearts are touched with the sense of our brotherhood to the very poorest and lowest of human creatures, when the distance between the rich and the poor seems less im-

passable, when abundance reaches out generous hands to want.

A strange thought flashed into his mind, inspired perhaps by the singing hemlock, and seemed to blend with the echo of Katherine's voice pleading for his people.

"They are cold, Father. I think they are *hungry*. Why do you let them be so?"

He had told her that all felt the depression of the times; but he knew there is a great difference between a moderate retrenchment, which calls for the sale of an extra saddle horse or for the dismissal of one of a corps of servants, and the pinch that sharpens the little faces of a man's children. Already they had submitted to a reduction in wages; but that day King Richard had decided on a further reduction. Suppose, instead

of carrying out this purpose, which the state of trade seemed to demand, he himself should bear the loss. Such a course would not be in accordance with strict business principles; but he could bear it, and they could not.

Acting on this just thought, King Richard found a pen and bit of paste-board, on which he announced that all operatives at the Kingsland Mills would be paid at the former rate of wages. This he tied upon one of the topmost branches of the tree, — a message of good-will that the most ignorant or stupid could understand.

It was Christmas night, frosty and clear. All through the evening the glistening stars looked down on groups of people hurrying toward the great house of King Richard, from whose windows a glowing light shone far out

into the night. Within was no hollow mockery of the Christmas festival, but generous, kindly cheer, warm and grateful hearts, and love and laughter.

Great logs blazed in the fireplaces, and all the house seemed to the dwellers of the dark, cold, little mill-cottages a marvel of warmth and light. In the dining-room tables were set, and great slices of roasted meats and mugs of coffee served, while more delicate dishes stood about in tempting abundance.

Flocks of children stood around the tree, wide-eyed and awe-struck, until won by Katherine into mirth. It was a magical tree, for dull eyes looking at it at once sparkled as if they caught some of its own glimmer. For this, then, it seemed it had grown so bravely all these years in Tim Martin's yard,—the beautiful whispering hemlock. But

although the house-door was constantly opening to fresh comers, Silly Willy himself had not come.

"Where can he be?" asked little Katherine of one and then another of her guests. "'Tis Silly Willy's tree, and he must come before the presents are taken from it." And no one had the heart to gainsay this. At length some of the men volunteered to go for him.

Then, to shorten the waiting, the games went merrily on, many of the full-grown men and women joining in. But some — those who had been longest in the mill, and remembered the old pleasant days — sitting apart, would glance at Katherine's golden head, with its tossing curls, and murmur, —

"'Tis as if her mother had come back again. Like enough things will

go better with us now." And then they would look at the placard King Richard had placed on the tree, and smile hopefully.

To this festal scene the Martin's cottage, into which the men entered, bore a startling contrast. There, life and light and mirth; but here only sorrow and silence,—for Willy lay dying. When he learned for what the men had come, he stretched out his poor weak hands toward them, smiling wistfully.

"It ain't too late," he said. "I'd like ter see the tree."

So they brought a stretcher, and as gently as they could—for their hearts were soft that Christmas night—those rough men laid Silly Willy upon it. In his hands were the twigs of the hemlock Tim had begged for him, and he was

smiling like a child who has never dreamed of pain. As they bore him out under the stars they heard the sweet, faint murmur of his voice, which had the contented sweetness of a tree singing in the soft summer breeze, or the low, tremulous happiness of young birds at dawn.

Over the soft white snow the little procession, with poor blind Tim at its foot, moved silently on. So they reached King Richard's house. Some one, hearing them approach, flung the door wide open. Involuntarily the people made room by pressing back on either side of the hall, leaving free passage down the centre. The men therefore came in and laid their burden down.

They placed the stretcher in front of the tree, with its myriad flaring tapers, its glistening tinsel and gold,—lovely

beyond any conception of Silly Willy's. With smiling expectancy Katherine stepped to his side. King Richard stood near, and Tim groped his way to his darling's feet. But nearer than all was the angel of death, who had laid its soft hand on those brave brown eyes, so that they saw neither the tree, nor that cheerful garlanded hall, nor smiling friends, nor the sweet little face of Katherine as she knelt by his side, eagerly begging him to awake and enjoy the feast that she had made for him.

King Richard looked down on the fair hair and white face, and the scene before him melted away. Again he seemed to see Silly Willy on the mill steps, blue with the cold, shivering and ragged, yet with the love-light in his eyes, as he waited for the opening of the door that he might go in and work for

the "little un." In his mad chase for fortune he had forgotten his obligation to care for this frail little servitor, and now it was too late. It was too late; for, smiling like a child who has never even dreamed of pain, with the hemlock pressed over his bosom, Silly Willy, in all his gentle innocence and love and trust, lay forever safe. He was beyond his power of helping, but also beyond the power of hunger, cold, or any other pain.

The old grandfather, pathetic in his blind helplessness, hung over the quiet figure, while the people with tearful eyes pressed around it, speaking soft and low in their pity and awe. They came and went, — those in the full tide of life, and those weak under the weight of weary years of service. They came and went; but King Richard never stirred. His

face was set with resolve, for at last he saw the obligations toward these dependents his place in life imposed upon him.

So it was that he came to his true kingship, giving help and protection to those who served him.

The title is still used in Kingsland Mills, but not in resentment.

Every Christmas night there is a feast at King Richard's for his people, and the spirit of Silly Willy is always present, for it is the spirit of peace and good-will.



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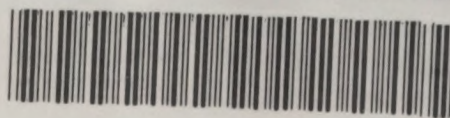


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